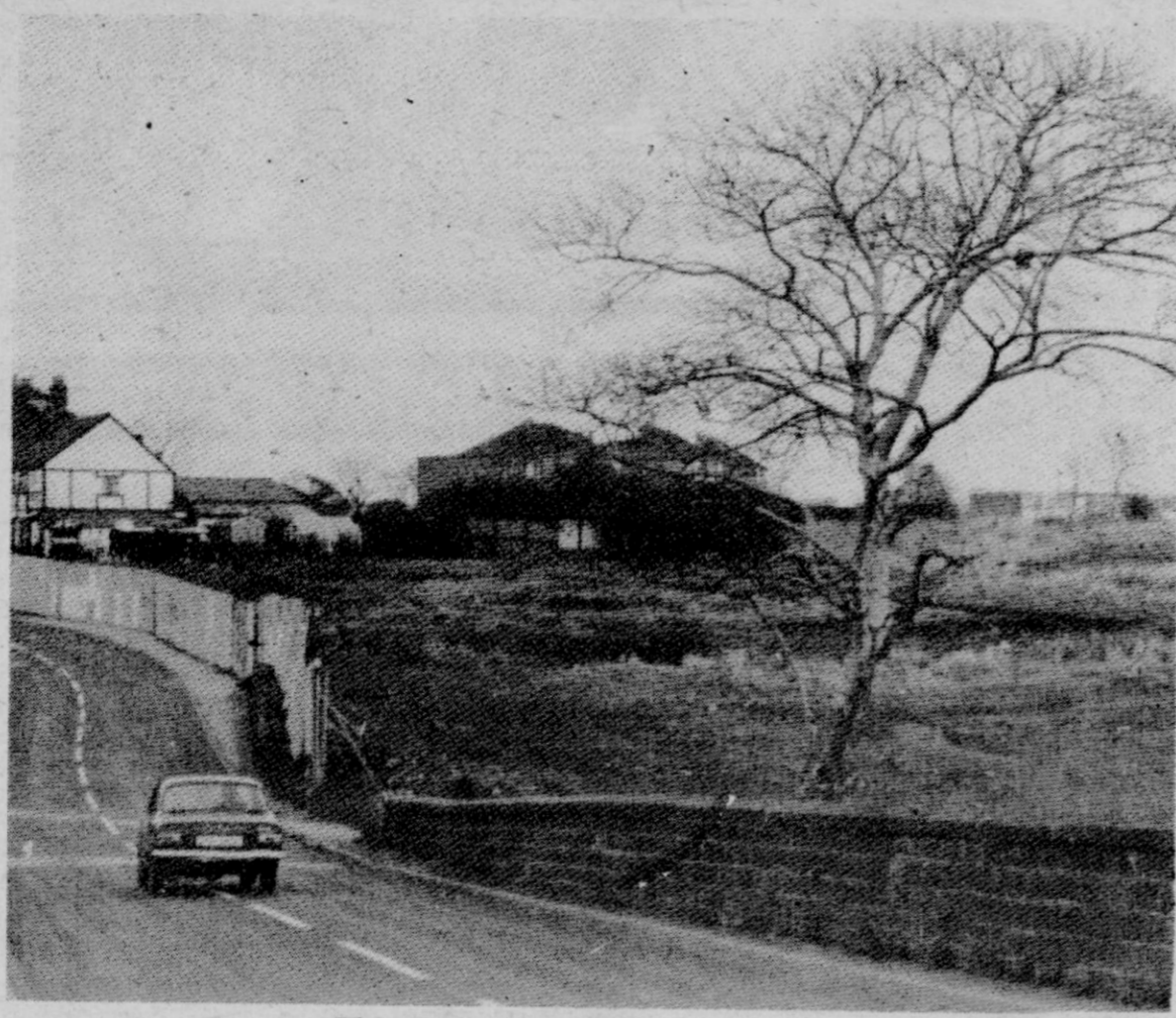


George gets the boot



The site at Dragon's Lane, Whiston

GEORGE Leatherbarrow, Kirkby's generous builder, has suffered a new setback.

His firm have been kicked off a site in Dragon's Lane, Whiston, where they were supposed to be building 124 houses for Knowsley Council.

The council took the unusual step of stopping work after the site was cleared, when irregularities were found in Leatherbarrow's contract.

Suspended council architect Eric Spencer Stevenson had apparently forgotten to specify a completion date in the agreement with his friend George.

The £1,149,000 contract was awarded to George Leatherbarrow at the famous Housing Committee

meeting on December 9, 1974. This was the meeting where architect Spender Stevenson concealed the identity of the firms tendering for contracts. Leatherbarrow were shown as "Firm A".

No one was more surprised at the outcome than contractors Holland, Hannen and Cubitts, who had carried out the first stage of the Dragon's Lane scheme. They were no doubt expecting to see the job through, as is usual.

Stevenson had earlier appointed a firm of consultant quantity surveyors for the contract without the council's permission.

These turned out to be his favourite consultants, Tweed, Atkinson, Lewis and Partners, who were much used by Kirkby Council on,

among other projects, the Tower Hill housing scheme.

The hold-up on the Whiston contract is not the first blow suffered by George Leatherbarrow since the Free Press revealed his generosity to Stevenson and former councillors Dave Tempest and Bill Marshall.

Consultants Tweed, Atkinson, Lewis and Partners had, at the time of the revelations, drawn up bills of quantities so that Stevenson could negotiate with Leatherbarrow to build 34 flats at Fieldway, Huyton.

The council put a stop to that little scheme immediately, and invited competitive tenders.

Sadly for George, his firm were not even allowed to tender.

Struggle to run centre

PART-TIME workers at the Rialto Community Centre in Toxteth are resisting attempts by the Liberal Council to crush the centre's independence.

The rigid controls the Liberals are imposing on the centre in Upper Parliament Street is a reflection of what is happening elsewhere.

Throughout the city, community groups have found their urban aid applications massacred, their budgets (if any) trimmed, and any freedom of action curtailed.

At the Rialto, the council want to appoint their own £4,500 a year professional warden.

NEW CONSTITUTION

The Education committee have also chucked out the Rialto's constitution and replaced it with their own. This means there is no longer a member of staff on the management committee.

The council also want to close the centre during the day to save money — and open just five nights a week.

A wide-range of activities are run at the Rialto (See Informer). And the workers say that if the centre is to be changed then local people should do it... not politicians and officials.

They say they are not going to give up their independence without a fight. "Even if we have to sit-in the building they won't get us out," Sophie James, one of the workers, told us.

CASTLE METALS

(Continued from page one)

West Gas £6.47; Castle Metals £6.99.

In any case cost should not have been the only basis for awarding such a vital contract.

Castle Metals have neither the manpower to do the job properly nor, apparently, the money to take more men on.

The firm, based at Yardley Road, on the Kirkby Industrial Estate, is in serious financial difficulty.

Not only have they laid off a number of production workers; Knowsley Council have had great difficulty getting last year's rates from them.

All but one of the company's 50,500 shares have been signed over to the Industrial and Commercial

Finance Corporation as security for a loan.

After only a few weeks of the Liverpool contract, work is mounting up. Calls for repairs are averaging several hundred a week.

One of those calls came from 70-year-old Mr Charles Lucy, of Gleave Square, Everton.

Mr Lucy phoned Castle Metals when his central heating went wrong on Thursday, November 13. No-one came that day.

The next day the caretaker smelled gas and called the gas board. They were there in ten minutes and turned the boiler off.

Nothing was heard from Castle Metals until the following Tuesday, when a fitter called. Unluckily, both Mr and Mrs Lucy were out.

Despite assurances to Mr Lucy,

Castle Metals did not send a man again until the weekend — and for some reason he was still unable to carry out the repairs.

So for well over a week, Mr and Mrs Lucy were without central heating and hot water. During that time all they had to rely on was a single fan heater.

And they're not the only ones. Pensioners Bernard and Margaret Quinn, of Prince Edwin Walk, Everton, were also kept waiting a week when their central heating broke down. Mr and Mrs Quinn had to borrow an electric fire from a relative.

A number of councillors were rightly concerned about Castle Metals getting the contract. The decision to give it them was taken at the Housing, Building and Planning Committee on September 18.

This could not be passed to the

full council until October 8, although new contracts were due to start on October 1.

Then, at the council meeting, the committee's decision was referred back for further discussion.

And councillors also decided that a small committee should have talks with North West Gas.

Before they began, councillors were told that Castle Metals, and the firm that got the rest of the work, R. Stewart and Co, of Widnes, had already started work.

Councillors were advised they had a moral and, possibly, a legal obligation to give them the contract — which they did.

● The value of R. Stewart's contract is estimated at £34,000 for the year. Mr Bagot has told us that there is no truth in the rumour that his firm is about to be taken over by Stewarts.

Knowsley auditors check firm's work

AUDITORS from Knowsley Council are making a detailed examination of payments made to Castle Metals for maintenance work.

Over the past 18 months the firm have been sharing the maintenance work on Knowsley's 11,000 gas centrally-heated homes with North West Gas.

But Castle Metals farmed out some of their work to a firm called A & B Engineering Ltd — and charged the council an extra 5% for doing so.

Not surprisingly, Knowsley Council were rather annoyed to discover that the man behind A & B Engineering was the man who also runs Castle Metals — Arthur Bagot.

Simply by switching work from one of his firms to another the clever Mr Bagot has been getting extra payment at the council's expense.

All this came to light during an investigation into a number of contracts to replace school boilers. This has already been referred to the police.

Last December, Borough Architect Eric Spencer Stevenson told the education committee that eight school boilers needed to be replaced.

He had obtained tenders through consultant engineers Sloan and Lloyd Barnes, of 34 Castle Street, Liverpool, who were engaged by Stevenson without the committee's permission.

Spender Stevenson simply presented the committee with a list of

the lowest tenders. And these were accepted.

Six out of the eight contracts — worth £47,000 — went to A & B Engineering.

However, following allegations by one of the council's maintenance inspectors, all the contracts were re-examined.

Only two of the six awarded to A & B Engineering were subsequently approved. The estimated cost of the work involved was nothing like £47,000. It was £8,500.

And the education committee ordered new tenders.

Bagot's firms also did well under the old Kirkby Council.

Castle Metals maintained all of their centrally heated homes. But they did not win the work by competitive tender.

Each year, Architect Spencer Stevenson would obtain quotations. And each year Castle Metals got the contract. Then in January 1973 a three-year contract was awarded.

A & B Engineering also did work for Kirkby Council. In June 1972 it was reported that the Chairman of the General Purposes Committee, councillor Dave Tempest, and his side-kick Bill Marshall, had awarded a £45,000 contract for work on the sports hall to A & B.

Then in March 1974, Tempest personally awarded a £5,000 contract to A & B in connection with the new Kirkby swimming pool.



George Lucy — left without heating or hot water

Action on demo news blackout

JOURNALISTS on the Daily Post and Echo have taken up a blatant case of censorship with the management.

It concerned a demonstration at the new Spanish Consulate in Rodney Street, Liverpool.

Inside the Consulate there was a reception for the new Consul. Outside was one of the first demonstrations in Europe against the execution of anti-Franco guerrillas.

Both local radio stations and television news gave prominence to the demonstration. But not a word appeared in the Daily Post and Echo.

This was especially remarkable since the paper had the event extraordinarily well-covered.

Two of the guests at the Consul's reception were Post and Echo Managing Director Ian Park, and Post Editor John Pugh. With them were a reporter and a photographer.

An off-duty reporter who saw the demonstration even phoned the news desk to check they knew about it. Know about it they did. But write about it they did not.

Because soon after the reception finished a memo was sent down to the news desk. It ordered that there should be no mention of the demonstration in the news report and that only pictures taken inside the Spanish Consulate were to be published.

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Printed and published by Liverpool Free Press Group, 48 Manchester St., Liverpool 1. Tel: 051-227 2514.

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